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NATIONAL MUSIC AND THE FOLK-SONG

By SYDNEY GREW

I

CONFLICTING views are held universally on the matter of nationalism in music. One body of musicians declares that *nationalism in music* represents a contradiction in terms and that the "national" composer does not and cannot exist. Another body declares that "nationalism" is the beginning and the end of music, and that if a composer is not deliberately and intentionally "national" he can never be a great composer.

Involved in this matter is the subject of folk-music. The nationalist says that British folk-music must be made the basis of British art (i.e., symphonic) music. He says that the composer must consciously and deliberately adapt folk-music to artistic ends, that he must write in the folk-song idiom, and that he must indeed imitate folk-music to the end that his music may acquire "national" characteristics. The nationalist claims that we must reject foreign music or at least refuse to be influenced creatively by foreign ideals. The anti-nationalist says exactly the opposite.

I believe that there is a two-fold cause for these differences of opinion—first, that the nationalist does not think sufficiently far forward or the anti-nationalist sufficiently far backward, and secondly, that neither body of musicians has an adequate idea of the nature of music, of its rise, growth, and ultimate development. I consider that each body misreads musical history, the nationalist recent history and the anti-nationalist history in general.

I try to show in the following pages that the truth of the matter lies midway between these two extremes of opinion, and that both bodies are about equally right and wrong. I try to show that music is formed as a nation itself is formed, and that just as a nation has "national" characteristics so music has the same. Also I try to show that there is a certain fundamental difference between folk-music and art-music, and that British folk-music is not exactly the same as the folk-music of other nations.

The anti-nationalist stresses an argument that, to my mind, has little natural force. The argument is, that since a composer cannot express the whole of his race, and since, again, he cannot help but express in his music features and attributes common to all humanity, the composer is at one and the same time both less and more than national, and so is not national. (This idea of an exact balancing of qualities, declared by the anti-nation-

alist to be necessary in the establishing of "nationalism" in music, is humorous.)¹

If such argument were of value, a stop would be put to our calling anything at all "national." It would put a stop to our use of terms of definition in general. We could no longer say that Bach for example was the great "Protestant" composer or that Dante was the great culminating mediaeval poet. It is no doubt true that the national composer does not represent every one of the many moods and emotions characteristic of his nation; but it is still more true that he represents all that matters. He represents the permanencies, the vitalities that live as long as his nation. He represents in selective synthesis all that distinguishes his nation from other nations. What he does not represent is the local, the transient, the superficial, the false, and the inartistic. I observe that the anti-nationalist does not specify the national qualities which are absent from such composers as Elgar the Englishman, Sibelius the Finn, and Dvořák the Bohemian. I have not seen it noted what essential mediaeval thought and feeling is omitted from the art of Dante or what essential German Protestant emotion is unrepresented in the music of Bach. I consider therefore that this particular argument of the anti-nationalist goes for nothing.

But the nationalist in his turn puts forward a proposition that to my mind is quite dangerously fallacious. It is the proposition that music must be made exclusively "national"—that the composer must take thought to represent national traits and characteristics and to represent these only. The nationalist bases his proposition on the assumption that music can be differentiated nation from nation to the degree that the nations themselves are differentiated.

It is here that he turns to folk-music; asserting that since folk-music is exclusively and recognizably national, it has the seminal power to generate art-music and the power further to nourish art-music to full growth.²

¹I showed that while no composer can be "national" (in the sense in which this word is always used by the "nationalists") because no composer can hope to express the thousand different mental worlds that make up the life and culture of any nation in any given generation, a score of different composers can still be British, let us say, in that each of them may express a phase of life that is distinctly British.—*Ernest Newman*.

²(a) We have a wonderful example of a nation deliberately and self-consciously putting aside foreign elements in music. I suppose no music to-day is more thoroughly national than that of Russia. This is because that brilliant group known as "The Five" set themselves to found a national school of music in the idiom of Russian folk-song.—*Martin Shaw*.

(b) It seems to me that a nation's music must be based on its folk-song. Where folk-music has been the inspiration, music has retained its individuality in a very much larger degree than in countries where it has been neglected.—*C. H. Moody*. To assert that English music can arise only by a composer absorbing into his tissues the folk-song genre of expression is to assert a monstrous fallacy.—*Ernest Newman*.

The nationalist advocates two elements that in art are impossible—isolation and self-consciousness.¹ He strives to deflect nature. He tries to arrest at a certain point the great instinctive force which brought his nation into being and established the national character. He asks for thought to be restricted and for feeling to be subjectivised, for the general and universal to be cut off and made local. He forgets that extreme nationalism, like extreme individualism, is a hermit-like withdrawal that stunts the imaginative faculty and weakens creative power. He forgets that when a nation or an individual has refused external, neighbourly influence, that individual or nation has ceased to produce art, particularly symphonic musical art, for the reason that we live, not by nationality or by individuality alone, but by the large and general world of which we form part. Isolation is as death. Self-consciousness is as a manufactured peculiarity.

Prussia teaches us the lesson as to the effect on music of extreme nationalism. Not one of the great German composers is a Prussian, though several of the more important German critics, theorists, and musicologists are Prussians. And the Russian "Five" teach us that even the most deliberate attempt to be national in music is not to be effected by a policy of rejection. Balakirew, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Cui, Moussorgsky, and Borodine studied Bach and Beethoven as thoroughly as they studied Russian folk-music. They kept themselves well-informed as to modern European music. They knew their Brahms and Wagner and their French contemporaries. Their larger symphonic music is great according to the degree of its agreement with the general musical spirit.

A deliberately restricted school of symphonic composition rarely lasts beyond a single generation. I can call to mind no symphonic work in the folk-song genre that has the vitality of an operatic pot-pourri or a Strauss waltz. Such a piece in England scarcely survives a dozen performances.

Thus it would seem that the nationalist misunderstands the value of the nationalist genius in musical composition. Yet it would seem also that the anti-nationalist underrates its value.² I consider that the idea of nationality is not generally understood in so far as it relates to music.

¹ I think a country's first duty is to be national, in music as in everything else. It will be time enough to talk of being international when English people have learned to be as interested in their own composers and executants as they are in those of other countries, and when our composers have learned the trick of translating into music scenes and emotions typically English.—*Hamilton Harty*.

² . . . "race" generally counts for much less in a nation's art and literature than the cross-fertilization that is always going on between the culture of one country and that of another.—*Ernest Newman*.

II

The fact should perhaps be definitely asserted that in the strictest sense of the term a piece of music can be nationally characteristic—that it can so clearly represent the nation as to be recognizably English, Hungarian, Slavonic, and the like.

If then a piece of music may be national, the composer of the piece must be a national composer. His piece of music may be a piece which serves for a short time only, and under exceptional circumstances (as the “Tipperary” song of Jack Judge) or a piece which serves generation after generation and which is perceived by foreigners to be almost idiomatically representative of the nation (as Arne’s “Rule Britannia”). It may be an original composition which represents one department only of the nation (as Dibdin’s “Tom Bowling”) or one which is so thoroughly charged with nationalistic instinct as to represent the entire nation and to make it dangerous in the eyes of the oppressors of that nation (as the “Finlandia” of Sibelius). It may on the other hand be an adaptation (as the “Lilliburlero” of Purcell, a song that helped materially to bring about the Revolution of 1688). Whatever the piece, its origin, or its significance, it is national music if it represents, serves, and satisfies the nation, and the composer of it is a national composer—he is the man in whom is most powerfully operative the national spirit, if only for an accidental moment of luck or inspiration.

In the nature of things it might appear impossible that a foreigner should create national music of the above clear type. Yet such is the universality of music that this has been done. Chiefly however, a foreigner can only “assimilate” the native idiom, as the Frenchman Berlioz in the case of the Hungarian “Rakoczy” March, and as the Austrian Schubert and the German Brahms in the case of Hungarian music in general. Speaking generally, national music is the product of a native: Sibelius could not have written the “Land of Hope and Glory” song or Elgar the tone-poem “Finlandia.”

III

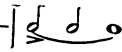
As help to adequate understanding of the idea of nationality in respect of music, I mention a few general facts and theories, reminding my readers at the outset, however, that according to the view of the anti-nationalist there is no such thing as a national “type.”

A national language is not an accident of place and circumstance. It is a logical outcome and an inevitable result of consistently operative forces. These forces are the national instinct, which gives the nation being and forms its character.

The difference between the English language and the German represents a difference between the national character of the two nations. The English people have by nature a national faculty to perceive essentials. They have a national desire for the perfect observation of the concrete and for the expression of exact shades of meaning. Hence the richness of their language in the matter of synonymous terms. By national instinct the English are poetically-minded. Their language is a perfect means of expressing emotionalized thought. The German people have a natural faculty to contemplate abstractions. They have a genius for metaphysical speculation (I am speaking of course with no eye on the 20th century). They have no equivalent desire for the objective expression under poetic inspiration of concrete ideas. Hence the poverty of their language in respect of synonymous terms and its intractability in the hands of the poet. Our mental character as a nation caused us to select and retain foreign terms. Our language is richly composite. The different mental character of the Germans has caused their language to remain homogeneous. But the national character of the Germans—the instinct to penetrate to the innermost heart of things, gave them a sense of depth and ultimate relativity. Hence the power of the German language to unify conceptions that are apparently dissociated and to flash out in a single sentence an exact image of the whole. (This power is akin to the peculiar power of music, the great and final art of synthesis.)

National ways of speech arise from the national instinct. The Englishman cannot master the Arabian guttural. The German cannot produce our hard and soft *th*. The Spaniard uses the *tch* sound, but he has no use for the associated *sh*. In the matter of verbal rhythm and accent, the French run with level emphasis to the end of the sentence. Where they stress syllables, such syllables are the ultimates. The English act differently. They throw the stress as far back from the end as is convenient, though under pressure of the national desire for objective clarity they generally accent the root-syllable of the larger compounds. The English place the key-word of an idea at the very beginning of a sentence, as in

SWEET are the *uses* of adversity

which converts such phrases into superbly poised anapests, the verbal parallel of the great musical anapest—

Certain moods are common to all thoughtful races. These are qualified by the national instinct. The result is manifested in the national art. By general consent the mood of melancholy, for

example, is held to appear in characteristic form according to the nationality of the artist. In Russian art melancholy has a morbid cast; it is egotistically pessimistic, the cause being the national tendency toward extreme self-analysis. In several aspects of French art melancholy becomes cynically pessimistic, the cause lying in the national regard for realism, which invariably leads to negation and denial. In English art melancholy has always been characterized by dignity and calmness. It has never been morbid or cynical. It has never been violent or abusive. The cause of this is our great faculty to see things objectively, particularly that thing which is ourself.

In the matter of sentimentality, the German is said to be tearful, the Englishman tenderly ironical, other races alternately passionate to the degree of wildness and languorous to the point of inertia.

In the matters of religion and philosophy, Luther could not have been formed by the Italian instinct or Savonarola by the German; Wesley and Swedenborg could not have been respectively Swedish and English; Carlyle (though not typically British—Whitman calls him "Gothic") and Jacques Thierry, two students of the French Revolution, very adequately betoken by various aspects the nations to which they belong.

Exceptions are but "instances of a law more refined." Many a German has a perfect English accent. The Silvestre Bonnard of Anatole France is a true, humorous idealist. Coleridge was seriously introspective (yet as an Englishman he found salvation in Chaucer: "His manly cheerfulness is especially delicious to me in my old age. How exquisitely tender he is, and yet how perfectly free from the least touch of sickly melancholy or morbid drooping!"). Tolstoy's ultimate optimism is of universal range.

The national character remains. The *average* man illustrates the type still. The anti-nationalist who declares the opposite is led constantly into contradictions. He himself cannot avoid compact synthetic generalizations;¹ and since these are the stock descriptive vocabulary of the nationalist, it seems to me that with his own hand he destroys what he has himself erected.

¹(a) What is a "Latin?" (b) We need not waste any time in trying to explain the modern development of French music in terms of a "French" or "Latin" predisposition. (c) The Englishman, who is supposed by foreigners to be a serious, coldly calculating, phlegmatic creature, is really a lazy humorist who loves to turn the serious problems of life aside with a jest. (d) The French . . . are in fact a nation of realists. (e) The mood of profound discouragement that breathes through so much of Debussy's music is purely local. (f) Modern French music is plainly the product of purely French conditions. (g) The peculiarities of Russian prosody are accountable for much of the individuality of Russian melody . . . these peculiarities are quite unreplicable in English. (h) Let us brush aside the misleading theory of race and racial characteristics.—*Ernest Newman*.

IV

Now all the various differences touched upon above manifest themselves in music and make music perceptibly "national" in character. The musician is aware of this by daily experience. The non-musician is able to perceive its possibility. As the mediaevalist Palestrina could not have written the nocturnes of the 19th century romanticist Chopin, so the Irishman who effected the little turn in the melody of the sixth line of the song "The Last Rose of Summer" could not have imagined the swift anapestic cadence of the Hungarian dance or its *alla zoppa* (amphibrachic) rhythm. No Frenchman could have imagined the brave joviality of "Down among the dead men." Beethoven could not have written the despairing close of the "Symphonie pathétique;" Tchaikowski could not have risen to the spiritually strong and joyous close of the "Sonata pathétique." The cause is the national instinct. The result is nationality in music.

We shall discover eventually that in certain respects music is more national than any other art. All art is revealing, and is therefore akin in spirit and manner to what it reveals; but music (the sum of the arts, approximation towards which results in perfection in other arts) is the most revealing of all. For music is the entirely spiritual art. It is the one art that is entirely creative. Other arts "produce change merely, not creation," as Browning says in "Charles Avison." This art is the direct representation of the soul; and it is by soul, not by mind, that a nation is distinguished and characterized. Its only companion in this respect is architecture.

Music appears late in the history of a nation and architecture early, partly for the reason that architecture is material in substance and music immaterial, but chiefly for the reason that where the spiritual emotion expressed in architecture is simple, perhaps elementary, that expressed in music is complex. Music and architecture are, however, the same at base, and the nation that has an architectural genius has also a potential musical genius. The former reveals national characteristics. The latter must do the same, but with less immediate obviousness.

The musical power in a nation remains latent until the national instinct is clarified, as if it were made locally active and concentrated upon the building up of exact and indubitable national characteristics. I will follow out this thought briefly in so far as it has reference to the particular subject in hand.

V

The national instinct has stabilized itself. It has unified the various native elements. It has synthetized their powers and

brought them to bear on a direct issue—the individualizing and the characterizing of the nation. It has so worked upon the people that when looked on from a sufficient distance the nation appears of one colour, as a star does, or a field, or an old building. It has taken hold of whatever foreign elements were imposed upon the native and subjected them to the same synthesizing process, reducing the whole to a certain homogeneity. It has eliminated dialect and created language. It has made the language an alert and nervous means of expression. In this indeed it has first proved itself. For as the original step towards nationality was a move from tribal independence and antagonism towards national unity and mutual interests, so the first great mental manifestation of the change was the creation of an instrument for conveying general ideas and for expressing thought upon abstract matters—faculties which are absent from patois and dialect.

Previously to this successful operation of the national instinct, the people had a ballad-poetry. This may have been splendidly vigorous, but it was concerned with simple feeling and single ideas, never with pure thought and dual ideas. It was essentially folk-art. The nation now has an imaginative literature. It produces drama, also poetry that translates easily and directly into other national languages—the supreme demonstration that the national instinct is perfected and the nation on the way to that universality of understanding which is the ultimate goal of all humanity.

Previously again to this operation of the national instinct, the people had a form of music. This was akin to its ballad-poetry. It was, of course, folk-music, later in time than its poetic equivalent, yet much the same in nature—concrete, non-dual, restricted in significance to the elementary mind of the “folk” and for that reason the more obviously “national.” It was not akin to art-music. Its point of view was relative, not absolute; its interests were local, not universal.

The appearance of art-music in a nation is proof that the nation has achieved a fullness of being.¹ There was in the middle ages no pure and absolute art (in the sense modern usage gives to those terms) because the national instinct was inoperative. Except for England, Western Europe was intellectually and, in many ways emotionally, as one nation. There was one religion. Latin was the

¹If music comes and goes in the course of time, it is because something happens at certain moments to disturb this fullness of being. A new addition to the mentality or spirituality of the race (or even a fresh accession of material interests) throws the race back to what (at least so far as music is concerned) forms inchoate primitiveness, out of which the race returns to elemental perfection again by a repetition of the synthesising process.

common language for art, science, and politics. Feudalism was the prevailing social condition. Gothic architecture became the general order. Music was a branch of mathematics, the companion of arithmetic and geometry, very beautiful at times, but impersonal in mood and utterly without national character—again with the exception of England.

As soon as the mediaeval peoples began to shape themselves into nations, all this was changed. National thought clarified itself. National languages were established. Imaginative literatures arose. Architecture began to take on national individuality. Music entered into its heritage. The superb mediaeval mind ceased to be no more than potentially music. With the dawn of modern nationality, and simultaneously with the rise of that objective ideal we call humanism, but aided not at all by the revival of classic paganism, music for the first time in recorded history became a warm and truly living art. It became spiritually emotionalized, representative at once of the individual composer and of the nation to which he belonged. (In a lengthy musical essay the statement might be proved by a comparison between the South German Froberger and the Italian Frescobaldi, still more by a comparison between the Englishman Wilbye and the German Schütz.) The national instinct had been stronger in England than on the continent between 1200 and 1600. The English were in consequence the great musical nation of those centuries. The famous rota "Sumer is icomin in" (c. 1250) is some two hundred years ahead of European music in the matter of technique. The very beautiful two-part song "Foweles in the frith" (c. 1270) is as emotional in its way as Bach and Beethoven. The Elizabethan composers are very nearly as "universal" in the way of music as is Shakespeare. Their music is equally "national." Music in England has risen or decayed according to the activity of the inner national instinct. Its folk-music arose chiefly between 1550 and 1650, as did that of most other European countries.

VI

Music therefore depends on nationality and must express the same. Yet music of character is never deliberately or restrictedly national. It is never parochial. It is the modern art, identified with the chief feature of modernity—the feature, that is, of large, extra-national thought and feeling. It reflects the general move to a unity of spiritual interests. It is the common spiritual language, as a thousand years ago Latin was the common intellectual language. It can never confine itself to the national folk-music.

Nevertheless art-music is moulded by the forces that made the nation. It is coloured throughout (but coloured only) by the national instinct. It is marked by idiomatic peculiarities. It starts with, and it never discards even in such mighty universalists as Bach and Beethoven, what John Galsworthy has termed "the local atmosphere and flavor which is the background of true art."

The national character is in any country the root of the tree of art. The branches of the tree may touch the branches of other trees. It must breathe the common air. But the roots must remain in the national soil (though to make the circle complete, those roots may stretch underground until they interlock with other roots; and the ground they cling to is inseparably joined to all the other ground in the world).

VII

The foregoing implies that since national character evinces itself in music, folk-music, in which that character finds exact representation, must enter into the composition of art-music. This is indeed the truth of the matter, but it is a different truth from that declared by the "nationalists." Art-music comes from folk-music: it does not stay with it, or go back to it. It cannot be supplanted by it.¹ For folk-music is a thing of restricted significance, as peculiar to time as to place. It loses value in its own country as the people of that country change and develop. It afflicts music with a sort of brogue. It presents a leaf where a fruit is needed—which is the point of the quarrel between our nationalists and anti-nationalists. Yet folk-music is necessary for art-music and it has always been present, whether the composer be a Bach or a Dvořák. I will justify this apparent paradox in a moment, when I have made clear the difference (difference amounting to antagonism) that exists between these two types of music.

VIII

The difference between a folk-song or dance and a symphony is about as keen as the difference between the mediaeval telling of the story of King Arthur and Shakespeare's "Lear" or between an ordinary fairy-tale and "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

In origin and intention folk-music represents the average simple man, the peasant, art-music the highly organized man, the man of modern complexity of mood who has returned by power of thought

¹Burn pianos, stop concerts, teach folk-song (original and imitative) in schools and universities.—*Martin Shaw*.

to simple feeling again.¹ The one represents things as these affect the individual as a detached entity, the other represents them as they affect all men, the individual in this case being the synthesis and summary of his nation and of the whole human race. The folk-musician sings of and for himself. He is the complete lyrist. The other sings of and for all men. If he is a Palestrina or a Bach, his art is epical, if a Beethoven, it is dramatic. The folk-musician produces subjective art, the symphonic-musician objective. Folk-music is as nature, art-music is as Sir Thomas Browne's "art (that) is the perfection of nature."

Subjective art is false to any world or time but its own. An English folk-song of 1600 may be as meaningless to an Englishman of 1900 as to a Chinaman. It may be as unsuited for symphonic treatment as an Irish song may be for the dancing of the Hungarian gypsies. It can be forced into a foreign world only by an inversion of Nick Bottom's offer to make the lion roar as gently as any sucking dove. Only when a piece of folk-music has some quality of universality can it have value for other times and places, as the traditional setting of "O mistress mine," which moves us to-day as deeply as it did four hundred years ago and which would probably move men of any nationality. But this remark is of general application. It applies to the dead world of mediaeval music. Arcadelt's "Ave Maria" still inspires us, and Arcadelt was before Palestrina. Therefore when such subjective art as folk-music retains significance, it is because it is not subjective at all, but objective, i. e., general and impersonal, common to all men and all times.

Until we can go back in soul to the conditions which produced folk-music, that music in most cases is only a curiosity, to be read as with a glossary. And if we so go back we arrive at conditions where art-music is neither possible nor desired, folk-music itself affording all the music wanted.

I do not stay to labour the point that imitated folk-music is valueless. Music is creation, not imitation.

Thus folk-music and art-music are antagonistic, belonging to different mental and spiritual worlds.

IX

It is only during the past hundred years that the folk-song problem has arisen and confused musical composition. The great masters worked wisely. They made of folk-music a means of

¹"In (metrical) literature, as in social life, the progress is from lawless freedom, through tyranny, to freedom that is lawful." Watts Dunton, in "Poetry and the Renaissance of Wonder."

approach to the highway of pure music. The smaller men of the 19th century followed it into what now seems to be little more than *cul-de-sacs*. We English are already tired of the greater part of Russian music, as (for different reasons) we are tired of contemporary German and French music. With the common sense that we apply to our own errors we have as a nation consistently rejected the similar mistaken efforts of our own composers.

We have in England made a twin-error. We have first misunderstood the nature of music, both folk and symphonic, and we have secondly misunderstood the practices of the great and successful German masters—we have imagined that our folk-music was like theirs and that it could be passed in the same way into art-music.

The German composers up to Bach (1750) were helped by the circumstance that their national songs and dances had an objective character. The German folk-song is akin to pure music. It is large in mood and solid in style, choral in design and intention, and orthodox in form (i. e., in rhythm, sentence shape, and general structure). It is "harmonic," not "melodic" in effect, epical, not lyrical. The church chorales and the love-songs are almost equally collective in mood. They are quite equally choral in plan. These remarks apply also to the folk-dances.

Therefore in the first period of German music, folk-songs passed readily into art-forms. In fact, they created those forms. The Bach organ chorales are no more than idealized representations of Lutheran hymn-tunes, and these pieces are the flower of German music up to 1750.

The German composers after Bach (1750-1825) had the same convenience. The change from Bach to Beethoven was very complete. It was from the deeply spiritual and intensely religious to the ardently human. The type of folk-music incorporated now into art-music was the peasant-dance, which—far more than the minuet, as is generally supposed—created the Beethoven scherzo, the head of this second phase of German music.

But another factor entered into German music with the passing of Bach—the factor of outside influence, the lesson of which is ignored by our present-day nationalists. German music by 1750 had exhausted the power of German folk-music of the type hitherto available. It required something fresh. This it found in the greater rhythmic movement of the folk-music of nations adjacent to Southern Germany. Haydn was a Croatian. Mozart lived in Austria. Beethoven went to Vienna almost as a youth. Schubert was Vienna born; he went further than the others and confirmed finally the symphonic borrowings from Hungarian folk-music.

After these three centuries of musical experience, wisdom was engrained in German composers. Even Schumann, introspective by nature, the prince of German romanticists, made no errors. He taught us what to do when in "Papillons" and "Carnival" he incorporated the old "Grossvater's Tanz." Brahms also made no errors, Richard Strauss the same, in whose "Till Eulenspiegel" is a touch of the folk-song spirit even more perfectly effected than the instance I have indicated from Schumann. Only the smaller German composers fell into error: Humperdinck's "Moorish Rhapsody" is as unsatisfying as Liszt's "Rhapsodie espagnole."

Now our English folk-music differs from German, Austrian, and Hungarian. It differs also from Bohemian, Swedish, Russian, and other types that have passed in one way and another into art-music. If it is to pass into our art-music, it must be by an entirely different process. It is utterly unsymphonic. It is monophonic, lyrical, lacking in passionate rhythm (I am of course speaking relatively), and has little of the genius that has made music in the past. If I am wrong in my opinion, I still ask where, after a full generation of "nationalistic" effort, are our equivalents of the fifty-one mazurkas of the Pole Chopin, the innumerable pieces of the Norwegian Grieg, the fifteen rhapsodies of the Hungarian Liszt, the twenty-one dances of the Hungarianized-German Brahms? The answer might indicate a few pieces by Percy Grainger and one or two other composers—ten or a dozen works still unproved by time against the many hundreds that have withstood from one to three generations! We have failed in this respect because of error. We have not failed because of lack of musical genius.

X

I would not be taken as intimating that British folk-music cannot pass similarly into art-music. My belief is that it can and must so pass. But this will be by a process of assimilation, not of imitation or of deliberate adoption, still less by following the practices of foreign composers who have a different order of material with which to deal.

I think indeed that in some respects the salvation of art-music depends upon our native folk-music. The time is ripe for a new departure. The German genius is weary. It has been weary for forty years. The genius of other races is immature. That of France is non-musical; the only great French music is the product of the Belgian-French César Franck. The British genius is very nearly as promising for music as it was for drama in the early days

of Shakespeare. We have in Elgar the one great classically-minded composer of the present generation. And in our native folk-music we have as rich a material as Bach had, or Beethoven. Only it is not as theirs. Yet like theirs it must be assimilated, and left to create as theirs was its own pure and absolute forms.

The English capacity to adapt and assimilate is, I believe, the greatest in the world. We took many things belonging to poetry from Italy in the sixteenth century; and immediately evolved the iambic pentameter of Shakespeare and Milton, with its constantly varying feet and measures of ionics, epitrites, and choriambes, its suspended emphases, movable cæsura, and extended enjambment. We took Hebrew philosophy, history, and poetry, and after adapting not only our own prose and poetry, but even our very language, we produced the one perfect translation of the Bible,—perfect, I mean, in the way of absolute art. The English have unified the many racial elements of the nation more compactly than have other nations; the process is being repeated in the United States. But in nothing have we succeeded where conditions were determined abroad, or where circumstances had essentially a four-square metrical exactness of character. Always have we needed the freest plasticity of both material and pattern; and so we could not, by nature, and quite apart from other considerations, have done much with music during the period from before Haydn to Wagner. The lesson for English composers is that which Shakespeare learned,—to know your subject, absorb its material, and re-express it in its own form. This, I perceive, is about to be done in England.

Our composers will then be national. They will represent the nation. They will also be extra-national, representing the whole world. Every one of us may find himself in Shakespeare, Bach, and Beethoven. Who finds himself in the self-conscious music of our strict nationalists? I sometimes think as things are in this respect that it is our nationalists who are anti-national and our anti-nationalists who are most truly and sensibly national.